

TS #IA1867
Copy No. 8

13 December 1958
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ICI Briefing Notes

Briefing of Senator Stuart Symington, scheduled for
Tuesday afternoon, 16 December 1958

SOVIET BALLISTIC MISSILE CAPABILITIES

A. Introduction

1. I want to make it perfectly clear at the outset of this briefing that everyone in the intelligence community takes with the greatest seriousness the Soviet capability in ballistic missiles, and in particular the USSR's emerging capability to have operational missiles of intercontinental range. While the views of competent experts may differ slightly as to the exact timing of a particular Soviet threat, our national intelligence estimates credit the USSR with a present operational capability with ballistic missiles of up to 700 nautical miles and probably 1,100 nautical miles range. Our estimates warn that the U.S. now faces the possibility, soon to be a probability, that the Soviets have operational ICBMs, and we have stated our belief that upon achieving an initial ICBM capability, the Soviets would build toward a substantial force of ICBMs as rapidly as practicable.

2. I also want to make it clear that the intelligence community welcomes each new piece of information and analysis of this vitally important subject. I can assure you, Mr. Senator, that I have no evidence that there has been any effort within the intelligence

community to suppress evidence or to prevent the fullest analysis of the views of any competent person with information to contribute.

3. Our estimates on Soviet missile programs and capabilities are under constant review. Subsequent to your report to the President (your letter of 29 August) we have conducted a thorough re-analysis of all evidence on the Soviet ICBM program, to determine the possible impact on our estimates of an apparent recent lag in test firings. Participating were the Guided Missile Intelligence Committee of the United States Intelligence Board and a panel of high-level consultants from other areas of government and from industry, whom I called together after consulting with Dr. Killian. I have advised the President of the results of this re-examination.

4. Among the major objectives of this review were:

- a. to reassess the possibility of undetected Soviet ICBM test firings;
- b. to review any evidence of operational bases and facilities;
- c. to ensure that our estimates of deployment and production time schedules were reasonable.

5. Our conclusions touch directly on the points about the Soviet program raised in your letter, in particular, your belief that there was intelligence to support:

- a. Some 35 to 50 Soviet firings to 3,500 nautical miles, in contrast to the six we reported;

b. The "advanced" and "widespread" construction of launching sites in the USSR;

c. grave doubt as to the compatibility between the small number of 3,500 mile test firings we reported and our estimate that the Soviets could achieve an operational capability with 500 ICBMs as early as 1961.

6. Today I will respond to the points you raised, bring you up to date on our latest evidence on Soviet ballistic missile progress, and give you our present conclusions about the Soviet program.

2. Soviet Ballistic Missile Testing

1. Testing to distances up to about 1,000 n.m. takes place at Kapustin Yar range, on which we have had coverage by multiple sources since mid-1953. Testing to about 3,500 n.m., as well as earth satellite launches, conducted from Tyura Tum, where range facilities became operable in the summer of 1957. Believe these two ranges are the only existing ballistic missile test ranges in the USSR; their facilities are adequate to support even an expanded flight test program.

2. Test firings continue at Kapustin Yar. Total ballistic missile firings since 1953 to distances up to 700 n.m. now more than 400, including about 40 since 1 August 1958 (about the time I last briefed you). Total to about 1,000 n.m. now 17, including 6 since 1 August. Continue to estimate that Soviet has operational missiles with maximum ranges of 100, 200, 350, and 700 n.m. Estimate 1,100 n.m. missile probably now available for operational use.

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3. Our estimate of number of missile firings since 1953, based on highly sophisticated integrated intelligence collecting system, combining scientific and conventional methods. Because of its nature, certain details of this system known to only a limited number of persons in the intelligence community. We believe that this system is efficient, and that, for example, no significant number of test firings to 3,500 n.m. has passed unnoticed.

4. Estimated total of ICBM firings to 3,500 n.m. remains at six, the first in August 1957, and the most recent in May 1958.

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Three Sputniks also successfully launched, the most recent in [redacted]
May 1958. Have also been [redacted]

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[redacted] four attempts to launch space vehicles of unknown nature, which we do not believe were successful (most recent early in December).

5. Have very carefully checked adequacy of coverage, with reference to your information on 55 to 60 firings to 3,500 n.m. or more. Neither we in CIA, nor the heads of the other intelligence agencies of government, nor the responsible analysts at any level with competence in this field, have information to support these figures. While all details of the firings may require considerable analysis, receipt of information as to the occurrence of a firing involves no time lag. We are therefore at a loss to understand how these figures could come as stated from our own intelligence sources.

6. Have no evidence and do not believe there have been firings from ranges in southern USSR into the Arctic region, nor ICBM firings with live thermonuclear warheads. However, a low-yield nuclear explosion several years ago at Kapustin Yar believed test of warhead in shorter-range ballistic missile.

7. Initial success of ICBM and earth satellite launchings leads to belief that components flight-tested at Kapustin Yar prior to August 1977. Undoubtedly there has also been considerable ICBM static testing, on which we would not expect to get hard evidence.

C. Conclusions, First Operational Capability

1. The number of Soviet test firings to 1,500 n.m. over the past year has not been as great as we had anticipated. Nevertheless, considering the Soviets' progress in the whole field of missiles and the capabilities demonstrated in their ICBM, earth satellite, and other ballistic missile launches, the USIS continues to estimate without dissent that the USSR will probably achieve a first operational capability with ten prototype ICBMs at some time during 1979.

2. While it remains possible that a limited capability with comparatively unproven ICBMs might have been established in 1978, we now believe this to be extremely unlikely.

3. Estimate of characteristics of Soviet ICBM remains

unchanged:

- a. Range about 5,500 n.m. (Khrushchev's claim to Senator Humphrey regarding a 7,500 n.m. missile for which they have no test range long enough, probably refers to this same ICBM. We believe it could be modified to achieve such a distance but that this is more than the USSR requires.)
- b. Designed warhead weight estimated at 2,000 pounds, with possibility that it is designed to carry 5,000 pounds.
- c. Accuracy (CIO) about 5 nautical miles.
- d. Reliability after launch 50 percent.
- e. Reliability and accuracy capable of considerable improvement by the early 1960's.

D. Production and Deployment

- 1. In this area our evidence is, in our opinion, unsatisfactory, and we are continuing on a highest-priority basis our efforts to acquire the information we must have. My panel of consultants felt extremely strongly on this point after their review of the evidence we have at hand. I am continuing to push this matter vigorously, both personally and through a special interagency committee on critical collection problems which we established in the intelligence community early this year.

2. Operational sites. On the basis of our estimates of Soviet research and development progress, operational facilities for medium range missiles probably now exist, and some ICBM facilities should be in various stages of preparation. But as of the present, our information with regard to operational sites as distinct from test ranges for medium and long range missiles does not give us a clear reading on Soviet activity, or, for example, on the extent to which fixed or mobile launching facilities are being prepared. We are, hence, not in a position to confirm your estimate that construction of Soviet ICBM launching sites is "advanced" and "widespread," or that such bases are being established in the Murmansk and Kazakhstan areas. We cannot confirm the existence of IRBM bases in the Baltic and Gulf of Finland area and the area opposite the Middle East. There has been construction work in these latter areas which might relate to missile sites; these and certain other important leads in the Soviet central Arctic region are being followed up.

3. With respect to this general subject, Mr. Senator, I wish to inform you that this fall we received evidence that one or more Soviet units equipped with 100 m.m. missiles and mobile launching facilities may have been deployed to East Germany. I believe the chances are good that we will pick up any large-scale deployment of these or longer range missiles into this particular area.

4. Production programs. Some additional fragments have been acquired very recently, indicating that production of ballistic missiles was under way at several Soviet plants during 1971 to 1976. On November 12th, 1975, in a speech to the Central Committee about the forthcoming Seven-Year Plan, Brezhnev stated that the production of ICBMs had been "successfully set up." Brezhnev's statement is not inconsistent with the emerging ICBM capability which we estimate.

6. We have carefully evaluated these and numerous other statements by Soviet officials, and believe they are in accordance with a Soviet attempt to convince the West that they now have a significant ICBM capability. We expect similar statements in increasing numbers. Such claims are a reminder that the ICBM is already and will increasingly be a prime weapon in Soviet political and psychological warfare.

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7. In our re-examination we took account of the Soviet emphasis on reliability and simplicity in ballistic missile design, of their considerable experience in shorter-range missiles, and of their probable philosophy of making maximum use of proven components in developing longer-range systems. On the basis of these factors, we believe that the Soviets would not necessarily require a large number of ICBM flight tests before entering into production. We have insufficient evidence to judge the present magnitude and pace of a Soviet program to produce and deploy ICBMs, and we consider it prudent to assume that such a program is under way. But we also believe that additional test firings at an increased rate will be required if our estimate of time schedules is to be met.

8. Conclusions, Future Operational Capabilities

1. Taking into account the complexities of the tasks which would have to be accomplished, we believe that the Soviets could achieve an operational capability with 500 ICBMs about three years after first operational capability date. Based on our estimate that a first operational capability will probably be achieved some time in 1959, we therefore believe that a capability with 500 ICBMs could be achieved some time in 1962. With overriding priority and exceptional success in their test and production programs, this capability might be achieved in as little as two years after first operational capability date, i.e., some time in 1961. Assuming a build-up in three years

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from first operational capability to a capability with 500 ICBMs, a capability with 100 ICBMs would be achieved in about a year and a half; assuming a two-year buildup, 100 would be achieved in about a year. Thus, we think it probable that the Soviets could achieve an operational capability with 100 ICBMs some time during the period from the beginning of 1960 to mid-1961.

2. Since there is no direct evidence on Soviet plans for quantity production of ICBMs, we have selected the figures of 100 and 500 operational missiles as yardsticks to provide a basis for measuring capacity to produce and deploy these weapons. These figures do not represent an estimate of Soviet requirements or intentions; in fact, it is possible that the Soviets themselves do not as yet have fixed plans in this regard.

3. We recognize that reasonable men might differ as to the Soviet capacity to have 500 operational ICBMs in 1961 or 1962. It is, however, the opinion of the qualified consultants with whom we have conferred that in the light of such data as we have on the Soviet program, our estimates of the pertinent Soviet capabilities are reasonable.

7. Concluding Note

In this briefing, I have not dealt with the comments in your letter which related to the U.S. guided missile program, as this is not within the competence of the intelligence community.

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